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ABSTRACT

A study focusing on the history of reading, or the uses of literacy, in the first years of the American republic examined the subscription list and content of "The New York Magazine; or, Literary Repository" for 1790. Data for the study were taken from the magazine's subscription list and from various biographical sources, such as the New York city directories. Contents of the magazine during its first year of publication were also analyzed. Although "The New York Magazine's" content would at first seem to be evidence of a rather elite audience, the subscriber list shows a varied readership. About half of the readers were artisans and shopkeepers. Considered together, the subscriber list and the content of the magazine offer insight into the social function of reading in that era. Magazine reading was closely associated with the values of artisan republicanism. The magazine can be viewed as an arena of popular participation in a formerly elite culture of science and education, arts and letters, virtue and honor, and cultivation and character. Although the content of the magazine was eclectic and seems elitist, its readers were not. The leadership at the time was Republican and "The New York Magazine" was republican literature. (Appendixes containing author's notes and a list of magazine subscribers are included, as are tables of findings.) (DF)

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History Division

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A REPUBLICAN LITERATURE

A Study of Magazine Reading and Readers in Late-Eighteenth-Century New York

by

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Presented to the History Division, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication annual convention, Norman, Oklahoma, August, 1986.

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History Division

Abstract

A REPUBLICAN LITERATURE

A Study of Magazine Reading and Readers in Late-Eighteenth-Century New York

by

David Paul Nord
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Indiana University

This paper is about magazine readers and reading in the first years of the American republic. It is based mainly upon a study of the subscribers to The New-York Magazine; or, Literary Repository in 1790. The data for the study come from the magazine's subscription list and from various biographical sources, especially the New York city directories. The study also includes a content analysis and careful reading of the magazine during its first year of publication.

The main theme of the study is that magazine reading in this era seems to have been a more broadly democratic activity than has usually been supposed. At first glance, The New-York Magazine's content would seem to be evidence of a rather elite audience. Yet the subscriber list shows a much more varied readership; about half the readers were artisans and shopkeepers. Considered together, the subscriber list and the content of the magazine offer some insight into the social function of reading in this era. Building upon the work of historians such as Sean Wilentz, the paper argues that magazine reading was closely associated with the values of artisan republicanism. It argues that the magazine might be viewed as an arena of popular participation in a formerly elite culture of science and education, arts and letters, virtue and honor, cultivation and character. The content seems elitist, but the readers do not. This was a republican leadership, and thus, by consequence, a republican literature.

Presented to the History Division Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication annual convention, Norman, Oklahoma, August, 1986.

A REPUBLICAN LITERATURE

A Study of Magazine Reading and Readers in Late-Eighteenth-Century New York

President George Washington was a subscriber. So were Vice President John Adams, Chief Justice John Jay, and New York Mayor Richard Varick. With such a distinguished readership, it is little wonder that the publishers of The New-York Magazine; or, Literary Repository decided to publish a list of subscribers to their first volume in 1790. Like all eighteenth-century magazine publishers, Thomas and James Swords were proud of their association with gentlemen of character, stature, and literary taste.[1] Yet men such as Washington and Adams were not the only readers of The New-York Magazine, as the standard magazine histories seem to suggest.[2] There were women on the list, and barbers, bakers, butchers, and boarding house proprietors. These are the forgotten readers of The New-York Magazine, and of late-eighteenth-century magazines in general. Who were these people? How did they make a living? Where did they live? What were they like? Were they different from non-subscribers? What kinds of material did they read? This paper seeks to answer these questions. It is, in effect, a magazine readership survey; and its purpose is to contribute to our understanding of the history of reading — especially among the shopkeepers and artisans of New York City — during the first years of the American republic.

As Carl Kaestle has recently pointed out, we have learned a great deal in the past twenty years about the demographics of simple literacy in the past, but we have only begun to develop a genuine social history of reading — that is, a history of the uses of literacy. This is hardly surprising, for as Kaestle says, it "is very difficult to trace printed works to their readers and still more difficult to trace meaning from the text to the reader"[3] This paper tries to do both, though with more confidence about the

former than the latter. It is a study of the subscribers and the content of The New-York Magazine in 1790. Its main argument is that magazine reading in this era seems to have been a more broadly democratic activity than has usually been supposed. At first glance, the magazine's content would seem to be evidence of a rather elite audience; and this has been the supposition of most historians. Yet the subscriber list shows a more varied readership. Considered together, the subscriber list and the content offer some insight into the social function of reading in this era. They suggest the importance of reading as a form of participation in the new social order of post-Revolutionary America. Edward Countryman has recently argued that "radical politics and nascent class consciousness foundered on electoral participation and on the spirit of voluntary association" in the 1780s.[4] Similarly, the magazine might be viewed as another arena for popular participation, in this case participation in the formerly elite culture of science and education, arts and letters, virtue and honor, cultivation and character. The content might seem elitist, but the readers do not. This was a republican readership, and thus, by consequence, a republican literature.

The Setting

In the immediate aftermath of the war, New York City would have seemed a very poor place to start a magazine. In 1783, New York was "a ruined city." Commerce was dead; nearly one-quarter of the city was burned over, the lingering reminder of two devastating fires in 1776 and 1778; and the population was little more than one-half of what it had been in 1775. In the late 1780s, however, the city made a remarkable recovery. The exiles

returned; trade revived; and in 1788 a building boom sounded throughout the city. In 1789, more than 1,100 sea vessels entered the port, and the population passed 30,000 — some 10,000 more inhabitants than on the eve of the Revolution.[5] New York, of course, was still no London, Paris, or Rome. Most of the streets were unpaved, and many were clogged with filth. Free-roaming hogs attacked the heaps of garbage, in competition with dogs and goats. A one-mile walk north on Broadway would carry the stoller right out of town.[6] But despite the hogs, the dogs, and the goats, New York was fast becoming the American metropolis.

New York was also the American capital in 1789 — perhaps its greatest pride. Though the officials of the Crown and many of the rich loyalists were gone, the local aristocracy — the Livingstons, the Schuylers, the Stuyvesants, and others — continued to dominate the social scene. In 1789-90, social life revolved around the federal government and President Washington, a faithful patron of pomp and pageantry. When Congress recessed for the day, the statesmen and socialites took their Wall Street airing — a parade of "the rich, the well-born, and the able," as John Adams put it.[7] At night, "the city was gay with all manner of festivities public and private — the balls and dinners were more numerous than the evenings."[8]

Of course, the true heartbeat of the city was trade, not government. Though New York lost the federal capital in the summer of 1790, it continued to flourish as a mercantile center, far outstripping Philadelphia in the value of exports and imports by the end of the century.[9] At the top of the commercial pyramid were the great merchants, bankers, and brokers. At the bottom were the cartmen, mariners, and common laborers. As always, the rich were rich, and the poor were often desperately poor. The bulk of the population, however, fell between these extremes. As Table 1 shows, my

sample from the 1790 city directory suggests that nearly two-thirds of the city's heads of household were artisans or shopkeepers. Other historians have come up with roughly comparable figures. Certainly the largest group of working people in New York in this era were artisans — that is, master craftsmen and their journeymen employees.[10]

What it meant to be an artisan (or even a shopkeeper) was changing by 1790. The traditional relationships among master, journeyman, and apprentice had begun to break down. Some masters were becoming retailers, manufacturers, or incipient capitalists. Some journeymen were becoming wage workers, with little hope of achieving the traditional status of independent master. Many shops were hiring untrained boys, without any commitment to the obligations of apprenticeship. The whole ancient system was shifting, very gradually, with the rising tide of laissez-faire.[11]

But though the economic world was changing, many of the values of the eighteenth-century artisan culture remained strong. In fact, these values were reinforced by the experience of the Revolution. During the Revolution and the decade of crisis that preceded it, the artisans and shopkeepers had become active participants in the political culture — first in crowd action, then in electoral politics. That commitment to politics would not subside.[12] Yet political equality and political participation were not the only components of "artisan republicanism," as Sean Wilentz has recently explained it. The tradesmen of New York and other American cities embraced an ideology that tied together a devotion to craft and to commonwealth. The artisans believed in equality and independence, but not as ends in themselves, for independence should free men "to exercise virtue, to subordinate private ends to the legislation of the public good."[13] Certainly, the artisans and small shopkeepers of New York City stood for

individual initiative, for economic progress, and for the rights of private property. Yet, as Wilentz puts it, they also stood for much more:

> With a rhetoric rich in the republican language of corruption, equality, and independence, they remained committed to a benevolent hierarchy of skill and the cooperative workshop. Artisan independence conjured up, not a vision of ceaseless, self-interested industry, but a moral order in which all craftsmen would eventually become self-governing, independent, competent masters.... Men's energies would be devoted, not to personal ambition or profit alone, but to the commonwealth; in the workshop, mutual obligation and respect — "the strongest ties of the heart" — would prevail; in more public spheres, the craftsmen would insist on their equal rights and exercise their citizenship with a view to preserving the rule of virtue as well as to protecting their collective interests against an eminently corruptible mercantile and financial elite.[14]

Gordon Wood has argued that the grand achievement of the founders in the 1780s was to move political thought from a classical to a romantic conception of republicanism. In the classical republican vocabulary, virtue and commonwealth were the key terms. For a republic to survive, individual aspirations must be wedded to the common good. This was the language of 1776. By 1787, the old words had taken on new meanings. The republic devised by Madison and his colleagues was a system that would not depend upon the virtue of the people. In the Federalist scheme, the traditional vices of republican government — individualism and self-interest — became strengths. The commonweal would emerge automatically in the competition of private interests.[15] While Wood's study brilliantly illuminates the changing political thought of the founding elites, it obscures the continuity in the political thought of those men and women of the "middling" classes. For urban artisans especially, the commitment to classical republican values remained strong, well into the nineteenth century. What had changed was the intensity of their insistence that they be recognized as

full-fledged participants in the making of the new republican commonwealth.[16]

The Magazine

It was into this milieu that The New-York Magazine was born. It wasn't the first attempt to start a magazine in New York in the post-war era. Just three years earlier, in 1787, Noah Webster had brought out The American Magazine. After only a year, however, he abandoned the project, mainly for financial reasons. "I will now leave writing and do more lucrative business," Webster said. "I am happy to quit New York."[17] Thomas and James Swords hoped for a better fate as they offered to the public the first issue of The New-York Magazine in January of 1790. Though they later complained regularly about the financial outlook ("the horizon remains dark and gloomy"), they did manage to stay in business eight full years — the longest run of any eighteenth-century American magazine.[18]

Part of the reason for the magazine's early success was its association with "a society of gentlemen," a local group of patrons of the arts and would-be "literary men," who began to work with the Swords brothers on the March issue. Their aim was to provide the magazine with "literary support" and editorial direction, and to promote "the pen of virtue and morality, science and taste." Clearly, The New-York Magazine represented the aspirations for culture and refinement of the American elite. The magazine's price was somewhat aristocratic as well — $2.25 per year, at a time when 50 cents a day was a common wage for a New York workingman.[19] Yet neither the editors nor the "society of gentlemen" viewed the enterprise as elitist. In an "Introductory Essay" published with the April issue, they proclaimed their commitment to the republican ideal of "equal liberty,"

especially equal access to knowledge. Following a eulogy to the democratic science of Benjamin Franklin, the editors described their vision of the purpose of a magazine:

> A well conducted magazine, we conceive must, from its nature, contribute greatly to diffuse knowledge throughout a community, and to create in that community a taste for literature. The universality of the subjects which it treats of will give to every profession, and every occupation, some information, while its variety holds out to every taste some gratification. From its conciseness, it will not require more time for its perusal than the most busy can well spare; and its cheapness brings it within the convenient purchase of every class of society.[20]

Was The New-York Magazine the province of the elite, as the magazine's tone suggests, or of "every class of society," as its editors declared? Fortunately, the answer to that question need not be pure guesswork, for the subscribers were listed by name in the 1790 volume.

The Readers

In 1790, The New-York Magazine had 370 subscribers, a small but respectable number for that time.[21] About 80 percent of these readers lived in New York City (Manhattan). About 5 percent lived in Albany; another 5 percent lived in other New York state towns; and the rest were scattered from Nova Scotia to Antiqua. The vast majority of subscribers were men (98 percent), though presumably many of their subscriptions were intended for wives and children as well. Seven women were subscribers in their own names. I located 90 percent (269 of 298) of the New York readers in city directories and/or other biographical sources. For 265 of these I was able to secure information on occupations and street addresses. For comparison, I also drew a random sample of 400 entries from the 1790 city directory.[22]

A quick glance at Table 1 confirms that the readership of The New-York Magazine was indeed more "up-scale" than the general population of the city. While nearly 50 percent of the readers were professionals or merchants, only 15 percent of the random sample fell into these two categories. Moreover, the most common professional occupation among the readers was lawyer, while among the general population the most common professional jobs were somewhat lower in prestige: local government official and school teacher. The difference between the two groups at the bottom of the scale is even more striking. In the random sample, 17 percent fell into the "nonskilled" category. Most of these were cartmen, laborers, and mariners. In the subscriber group, only four individuals were classified as "nonskilled": a gardener, a nursery man, a washer, and a widow. The first two would certainly score higher on a measure of skill than laborers or cartmen, and they may not even belong in this category. The other two were women, and one of those was a Beekman, one of the leading families of the city. It might be said, therefore, that virtually no one from the very bottom of the socio-economic scale subscribed to The New-York Magazine.[23]

Table 1 about here

Though the proportions at the top and bottom of the occupational scale for the two groups look quite different, the middle range proportions are much less disparate. About half of the subscribers were shopkeepers or artisans, compared with two-thirds of the random sample. While this is a significant difference, of course, I would argue that 50 percent is still a substantial proportion. If it is important that half the readers of The

New-York Magazine were merchants and professionals, it is equally important that the other half were artisans and shopkeepers. Both groups deserve a closer look.

Who were the elite readers? Most were merchants. More than one-quarter of the total list of subscribers identified themselves simply as merchants. The range of wealth and income within this category was large. Some "merchants" were doubtless no more than hopeful or pretentious shopkeepers; others were the leading commercial operators of the city and of the nation. Whether large or small, most merchants of that era were somewhat unspecialized, working on commission and handling a variety of goods. For example, one of the New-York Magazine subscribers advertised in a local newspaper a stock of Madeira wine, Carolina indigo and rice, China tea, a house and lot on Queen Street, thirteen acres near Harlem, and "a neat post chaise with harness." Another subscriber advertised imported cloth, buttons, buckles, glass, and "continental certificates" — and he was willing to barter for "country produce."[24]

If the prestige of an address reflects status, the merchants in the subscriber group may not have been much more well-to-do than merchants generally. Forty-two percent of the merchant readers held addresses on the most important business streets of the city: Queen (now Pearl), Water, and Hanover Square. But 37 percent of the merchants in the random sample also had addresses on these same streets. In both samples, only a scattering of individual merchants lived in the more distant sections of the city — that is, north of what is now Fulton Street or west of Broadway.

Though many of the merchant readers were small-scale operators, some were the leaders of the mercantile elite. The names of Beekman, Kip, Livingston, Roosevelt, Van Rensselaer, and Verplank — old families and old

money — dot the list.[25] Another subscriber, William Duer, is an example of a new-money man who read The New-York Magazine. Duer was perhaps the leading speculator of the day in land, securities, government contracts, and manufacturing ventures. He had made one fortune during the war, and he was hard at work on another in 1790. Besides the big merchants, some of the most prominent lawyers and politicans of the city were subscribers. Egbert Benson, one of the leading conservative assemblymen of New York in the 1780s, was on the list. So was James Duane, former Congressman and mayor of New York. And, of course, Washington, Adams, et al. Little wonder that the Swords brothers had such high hopes for their little magazine.[26]

But half the readers were not so wealthy or so prominent. Half were shopkeepers and artisans. Most of the shopkeepers, about 60 percent of them in both the subscriber group and the random sample, were listed simply as shopkeepers, storekeepers, or grocers. The others represented a variety of specialties: taverns, livery stables, bookstores, paint stores, hardware stores, tobacco shops, and so on. The main street for shopkeeper subscribers was Broadway, an up-and-coming business and residential street in New York in 1790. Others lived throughout the city. The artisans were a larger and even more varied group. Altogether, thirty-nine different trades were represented on the subscription list, compared with forty-eight trades in the random sample.

What kinds of artisans were likely to read The New-York Magazine? The quick answer seems to be: all kinds. The range of trades is striking, with many crafts represented by a single subscriber.[27] Yet some patterns may be discerned. Table 2, for example, shows the leading ten artisan occupations for the subscribers and for the random sample. By far, the three leading trades in the general population were shoemaker, carpenter, and tailor,

which account for nearly 37 percent of the artisans in the random sample. These three trades were not the leading trades among the artisan subscribers, however, though they were well represented, as Table 2 shows. The top three trades among the subscribers were carpenter, printer, and sea captain. This is an interesting comparison, for no printers or sea captains turned up at all in the random sample. Obviously, these were not common artisan occupations; yet they were relatively quite common on The New-York Magazine's subscription list. Conversely, two crafts — blacksmith and blockmaker — appear in the top ten artisan occupations in the random sample, but not at all on the subscription list.

Table 2 about here

Why printers and sea captains (but not blacksmiths and blockmakers) would subscribe to a magazine seems fairly obvious. Their trades and their life styles were clearly more associated with reading. The same might be said for the barbers, whose customers loitered around the shops then just as they do today. But what of the coppersmiths and cutlers, the saddlers and sailmakers? The street addresses of the artisans provide a clue. The magazine subscribers were somewhat more likely than other artisans to live and work in the commercial heart of the city. This difference should not be exaggerated, however; the artisan subscribers were spread out among thirty-four different streets in the city. Yet the artisans in the random sample were spread out even more widely on sixty-seven different streets, including some of the newer and less-built-up areas around Bowery Lane on what was then the far northeast side of town.

Table 3 shows the difference. The artisan subscribers were more concentrated on the same streets as the merchant subscribers: Queen, Water, and Hanover Square. King Street (now Pine) was another prominent street in this same area. Again, this concentration should not be overstated; the artisans from the random sample were also heavily represented on Queen and Water. But the other main streets for them — Fair (now Fulton), Ann, and Chatham (now Park Row) — were several blocks farther north on the outskirts of the commercial center of the city in 1790.

Table 3 about here

Because little is known about most of the individual artisan subscribers, it is difficult to say what sort of men they were. But at least some of them were clearly men of stature and influence, both within their crafts and in the larger public culture. Some were on their way to becoming manufacturers and capitalists. For example, White Matlock, a brewer on Chatham Street, was vice president of the New York Manufacturing Society, which was headed by the well-known merchant-politician Melancthon Smith. The aim of this society was precisely to move manufacturing from handicraft to factory.[28] Other artisan subscribers, on the other hand, were just as clearly devoted to the craft tradition. The chairman and deputy chairman of the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen were both readers of The New-York Magazine. Anthony Post was a carpenter; James Bramble was a whitesmith (tinned or galvanized iron). The General Society, founded in 1785, was a revival of the radical mechanics' committee of the 1770s. It was an organization of substantial, ambitious, and politically active master

tradesmen. By 1796, for example, Anthony Post owned property valued at 3,500 pounds. But it was also a group devoted to the traditions of craft work and to the values of artisan republicanism.[29]

The Content

The content of The New-York Magazine did not impress William Loring Andrews, one of the earliest of the few historians who have written about the magazine. His enthusiasm was expended on the copperplate engravings that formed the frontispiece of each issue. Of the rest of the content, he wrote:

> Aside from the record of marriages and deaths and a few local items of some slight historical importance, there is nothing in the literature of The New-York Magazine that, if it had been totally destroyed, would have proved a serious loss to posterity or to the world of letters.[30]

In a sense, Andrews was right. Except for some early poetry by William Dunlap, the literature of The New-York Magazine is of little interest to "the world of letters."[31] But it is of great interest to the social historian of reading, for here we can see what the merchants, shopkeepers, and artisans described above actually read in 1790.

Through a simple content analysis and a close reading of the 1790 volume, I discovered that many of the conventional notions about late-eighteenth-century American magazines are true of The New-York Magazine.[32] The magazine was highly eclectic — in subject matter, in style, and in source of material. Most of the essays and articles were conventional, didactic, and sentimental. Few dealt directly with politics or government. Yet running through the magazine were themes and values closely associated with classical republicanism. In many ways, the content of The New-York

Magazine was very much devoted to the "didactic arts," those arts and sciences considered useful to the cultivation of virtue and character, the essential ingredients of republican men and women.[33]

Table 4 about here

Table 4 suggests the range of material in The New-York Magazine. While a good deal of the content was given over to discussions of specific topics in politics, religion, or science, the largest proportion of the articles fell into a more nebulous area that I have labeled "manners and morals." As Table 5 shows, many of these pieces were romances — usually sentimental stories of love lost or found, seduction resisted or embraced. Many were simple expositions on virtue — with titles such as "Vanity," "Avarice," "On Idleness," "The Benefits of Temperance," or simply "On Virtue." Many were purely descriptive pieces — travelogues, anecdotes on manners and customs, sundry tales of exotica. Counting all the prose pieces for 1790, about two-thirds were written in descriptive or expository style; one-third were narratives. About one-eighth were set in New York City; seven-eighths were set elsewhere or had no specific locale.

Table 5 about here

What were these stories and articles like? A closer look at some of the regular features and some of the long-running serials provides some insight. Three of the most frequent contributors to The New-York Magazine in 1790

were "Philobiblicus," "Juvenis," and "The Scribbler." They rather nicely represent the range of material in the magazine, from the arcane to the mundane.

"Philobiblicus" falls into the arcane category. He contributed a piece each month on scriptural matters, especially issues in Biblical translation. The more subtle the philology, the more complex the etymology, the better "Philobiblicus" liked it. His aim, he said in his first piece, was to be "both instructing and entertaining," particularly through the use of "fine language and elegance of expression."[34]

"Juvenis" was more practical. Virtually all of his many pieces were little homilies on virtue. In a variety of ways, he preached a simple sermon, "that happiness results from the constant practice of virtue." On his list of the important virtues were the traditional ones. "The very ideas of justice, truth, benevolence, modesty, humility, mildness, and temperance please and beautify the mind," he wrote.[35]

"The Scribbler" was considerably more down to earth, even earthy, than either "Philobiblicus" or "Juvenis." Writing was his avocation; he was an artisan by occupation, though in what craft he doesn't say. In his first contribution he tells the story of how excited he had been as a young man to see his first piece of writing appear in a newspaper. He began to daydream and to imagine himself a great writer and a great man:

> In my reflections upon it next day, I beheld myself wielding a pen with all the force of a furious and animated combatant, until reaching to supply it with ink, I overturned one of the implements of my profession. The noise brought me to my proper recollection, and, strange metamorphosis! I found myself in my master's workshop, busied in the execution of a design which my extraordinary avocation had destroyed, and surrounded by my fellow apprentices, who were looking at my actions with astonishment, and picking up the remains of the valuable instrument which I had thrown down, and which was broken to pieces. For

> this piece of mischief I was severely corrected by my master, but the disaster did not prevent me in the prosecution of my favorite hobby horse. I continued to wield the goose-quill, and I every day saw myself rising into consequence by the respectable figure Mr. Scribbler made in the newspapers.[36]

"The Scribbler's" contributions continued to touch on the lives of the "middling" classes of New York City.

The long-running serials in 1790 also reflect the range of material in The New-York Magazine. In this category, the most arcane may have been the series called "Observations on the Utility of the Latin and Greek Languages," which ran for eight months beginning in April. In this series, "T.Q.C." summarized in copious detail all the various arguments supporting the study of the ancient languages — ranging from the needs of Christianity to physiology.[37] Another prominent monthly feature was the serialization of John Adam's Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States, a book that explored and promoted English constitutional theory as much as Ame[illegible]an.[38] A third serial that ran for many months was "The History of the Dutchess de C_____," a romance of passion, power, intrigue, confinement, cruelty, terror, outrage, and calamity among the rich and well-born of Europe.[39]

The other material in the magazine shows a similar diversity. For example, many of the articles and stories were aimed at women. Some of these were conventional reflections on feminine virtues: "How much more pure, tender, delicate, irritable, affectionate, flexible, and patient is woman than man?"[40] Some were advice pieces: "On the Choice of a Husband," or "On the Virtue of Acorn Coffee" ("to cure the slimy obstructions in the viscera"), or on how to behave in company (no "sitting cross-legged, straddling, spitting, blowing noses, etc., etc.").[41] Some were parables of seduction and lost virtue, such as the sad story of "Frivola," who became so

obsessed with luxury that she ended her wasted life in Europe, the slave of "every species of polite dissipation."[42] But some pieces were less conventional. These included tales of women's heroism, calls for women's education, and articles by women sensitive to women's concerns. An example of the latter was a piece criticizing men for always talking about women's vanity.[43]

Despite all the diversity, however, some important themes recur. Virtue, for example, was commonly portrayed as public virtue. The golden rule was taken very seriously by the contributors to The New-York Magazine. "Amongst the number of public virtues we may note love to our country, zeal in promoting the good of society, seeking the good of our neighbor in all our conduct," wrote the author of a piece called "On Virtue." Similarly, even the deeply religious "Juvenis" stopped far short of arguing that virtue is a private matter between a man and God. If a man is virtuous, he wrote, "he has sacrificed his own interest rather than wrong his neighbor. He has been benevolent to his fellow men. The children of poverty and affliction he has assisted and consoled."[44] The relationship between virtue and commonwealth was vividly clear in the pages of The New-York Magazine.

Another recurrent theme was suspicion of luxury. On this theme, the aphorisms abounded: "Luxury and idleness are similar in their effects — By the former, families are reduced to indigence, and are involved in misery and ruin; by means of the latter, they are prevented from arriving at a comfortable situation in life." The parables and allegories were equally common. In one, "Wealth" and "Poverty" meet each other on life's road at the end of their journeys. In a piece called "On Avarice," the author argued that "the avaricious man regards nothing but his purse; the welfare and prosperity of his country never much employs his thoughts.... He is a

stranger to public spiritedness." The theme was always that luxury is self-defeating because it is self-serving.[45]

A third recurrent theme was the power and democracy of knowledge. In America, everyone had a right and a duty to participate in the life of the mind. Some writers put this theme rather bluntly. In a paean to science, one writer declared:

> It is indeed questionable whether an ignorant people can be happy, or even exist, under what Americans call a free government. It may be also doubted, whether a truly enlightened people were ever enslaved. Science is so meliorating in its influence upon the human mind, that even he who holds the reins of power, and hath felt its rays, loses the desire of a tyrant, and is best gratified in the sense of public love and admiration. Liberty is a plant which as naturally flourishes under this genial light, as despotism is engendered by the horrors of intellectual darkness.[46]

In more subtle form, this theme ran through many of the articles in The New-York Magazine in 1790. Women, for example, were urged "to attend to the cultivation of letters." Even "Philobiblicus," the master of erudition, argued that instruction in Latin and Greek should be central even to a "republican education," for in a republic everyman should be and could be a scholar.[47]

Public virtue, suspicion of luxury, and the power and democracy of knowledge — these were republican themes, and they were freighted with meaning for eighteenth-century Americans, perhaps especially American artisans. Of course, these themes did not appear in every story and article in the magazine. But they were common enough to run like brightly colored threads through the great diversity of material, from heavy political discourse to ethereal romance. This, then, was what the readers of The New-York Magazine — the shopkeepers and artisans, as well as the merchants and politicians — were reading in 1790.

Conclusion

In its first issue in January, 1790, The New-York Magazine published an article titled "On the Means of Preserving Public Liberty." It is a nice summary of what might be called a republican ideology of magazine reading. "Information," the article said, had been the mainspring of the Revolution, and "education" must now be the wellspring of the new republic. The author continued:

> The road to preferment is open to all, and the common citizen may see his children possess the first offices of state, if endowed with genius, honesty, and science.... As the best preservative of national liberty, the public ought to patronize institutions to instruct the children of the poor people; for, give them knowledge and they will never be the instruments of injuring mankind. A few incautious expressions in our constitution, or a few salaries of office too great for the contracted feelings of those who do not know the worth of merit and integrity, can never injure the United States, while literature is generally diffused, and the plain citizen and planter reads and judges for himself.... Disseminate science through all grades of people, and it will forever vindicate your rights.[48]

This kind of language surely made sense to the readers of The New-York Magazine in 1790. The lawyers, the merchants, and the politicians understood. They knew and had long known that knowledge was power. But the other half of the readers, the shopkeepers and artisans, understood as well. They understood the words of this article — and of the magazine in general — as a call to participation in the whole culture — participation in politics and government, of course, but also in science and education, in art and literature. They understood these things, because participation in the broadest sense was what artisan republicanism was all about.

APPENDIX A

Notes on Method

As far as I have been able to determine, this study is the first readership research based upon the subscription list of an eighteenth-century magazine. The methods that I used were fairly simple. I started with the list of 370 subscribers published in The New-York Magazine; or, Literary Repository, vol. 1 (New York: Thomas and James Swords, 1790), pp. iii-vi. The list itself identified 298 of these as residents of New York City. I located information on 265 of these New Yorkers in city directories or, in a few cases, in the biographical sources cited in the footnotes. The directories I used were The New-York Directory and Register (New York: Hodge, Allen, and Campbell, 1789 and 1790) and The New-York Directory and Register (New York: T. and J. Swords, 1791 and 1792). I also drew a random sample of 400 entries from the 1790 directory. These two groups — the subscriber census and the random sample — provided the data for the reader analysis.

Of course, some people do not appear in these directories, and historians have usually assumed that common laborers, especially mariners, were substantially under-represented. Yet I found the opposite to be true as well — that is, a few of the wealthy merchants on the subscription list did not appear in the city directories. I identified them from other biographical sources. Since I was able to trace only well-to-do people, not poor people, in these other sources, my survey of subscribers may be even

more upwardly biased. On the other hand, because some of the incipient manufacturers in New York in 1790 still sometimes listed themselves as artisans, there is a countervailing downward bias in the survey as well. Overall, I tend to agree with Carl Kaestle that the New York directories from the 1790s probably provide a fairly reliable representation of the range of occupations in the city. See Carl F. Kaestle, The Evolution of an Urban School System: New York City, 1750-1850 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), pp. 31-32. I'm confident partly because I was able to trace all but 33 of the New York subscribers. Moreover, if there is an upper-class bias in my survey, that would, of course, have a conservative effect upon the conclusions of the study, undercounting those at the lower end of the economic scale. This also gives me some confidence in my suggestion that shopkeepers and artisans made up about 50 percent of the readers of the magazine.

The classification of occupations in Table 1 and Appendix B is based largely upon my own understanding of late-eighteenth-century employment, but it does not differ radically from the schemes used by other historians, such as Carl Kaestle in Evolution of an Urban School System and Howard Rock in Artisans of the New Republic. See also Michael B. Katz, "Occupational Classification in History," Journal of Interdisciplinary History, 3 (Summer, 1972), 63-88. Several of the occupations in the "professional" category (such as clerk and local government official) are perhaps out of place there. Similarly, gardener and nurseryman may not belong in the "nonskilled" category. But these involve so few individuals that I don't believe that the argument is distorted. Furthermore, the identical classification scheme was used for both the subscriber census and the random sample, so the comparative statements should be fairly reliable.

For the content analysis, I simply classified articles by topic. The unit of analysis was the individual article or story, though certain standard groupings of items were counted only once per issue. These included "American Muse," a collection of poems in each issue; "Intelligence," a monthly collection of short news items; "Marriages" and "Deaths"; and "Congressional Affairs," excerpts from the proceedings of Congress (coded as "politics"). I did not code the copperplate engravings at the beginning of each issue. I did not code advertisments, because in 1790 there were none. Fine distinctions among categories are not important for the argument of this paper, so the detailed codebook for the content analysis is not included with this appendix. The aim was simply to get a general idea of the manifest content of the editorial matter in the magazine. The simple inter-coder reliability coefficient for the content analysis was approximately .85, with most of the ambiguity within the "manners and morals" category (Table 5).

APPENDIX B

Occupation List of Subscribers

1. PROFESSIONAL:

attorney	military officer
benevolent society	minister
clerk	physician
college	college student
federal government official	teacher
local government official	

2. MERCHANT:

banker	insurer
broker	merchant

3. SHOPKEEPER:

boarding house	porter house
bookstore	ship chandler
grocer	store or shopkeeper
ironmonger	tavern
jewelry store	tobacco store
livery stable	vendue master
paint and glass store	

4. ARTISAN:

baker
barber
bookbinder
brewer
butcher
cabinet maker
carpenter
carver and gilder
chairmaker
chandler
clock and watchmaker
coach painter
cooper
copperplate printer
coppersmith
cutler
dancing master
distiller
furrier
glover
gold and silver smith
hatter
mason
mathematical instrument maker
nail maker
pewterer
pilot
printer
saddler
sailmaker
sea captain
ship carpenter
ship joiner
shoemaker
tailor or mantua maker
tanner or currier
type founder
upholsterer
weaver
whitesmith

5. NONSKILLED:

gardener
nurseryman
washer
widow

NOTES

[1]"Preface," The New-York Magazine; or, Literary Repository, vol. 1 (New York: Thomas and James Swords, 1790), p. viii. Mathew Carey, proprietor of The American Museum magazine in Philadelphia, was similarly proud of the respectability and character of his subscribers. See "Preface," The American Museum, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Mathew Carey, 1787).

[2]Frank Luther Mott, A History of American Magazines, 1741-1850 (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1930), pp. 115-16; James Playsted Wood, Magazines in the United States (3rd ed.; New York: Ronald Press, 1971), p. 26.

[3]Carl F. Kaestle, The History of Literacy and the History of Readers, Program Report 85-2 (Madison, Wis.: Wisconsin Center for Education Research, 1985), p. 43.

[4]Edward Countryman, A People in Revolution: The American Revolution and Political Society in New York, 1760-1790 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), p. 294.

[5]Sidney I. Pomerantz, New York: An American City, 1783-1803 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), pp. 19-21, 155-56, 199-200; Thomas E.V. Smith, The City of New York in the Year of Washington's Inauguration, 1789 (New York: Anson D.F. Randolph, 1889), pp. 5-7. The most detailed account of day-to-day events in New York City during this era is I.N. Phelps Stokes, The Iconography of Manhattan Island, vol. 5 (New York: Robert H. Dodd, 1926).

[6]Frank Monaghan and Marvin Lowenthal, This Was New York: The Nation's Capital in 1789 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran, 1943), pp. 29-32.

[7]Pomerantz, New York, pp. 460-61; Monaghan and Lowenthal, This Was New York, pp. 33-34 (quote from Adams, p. 34).

[8]Martha J. Lamb and (Mrs.) Burton Harrison, History of the City of New York: Its Origins, Rise, and Progress, vol. 3 (New York: A.S. Barnes, 1896), p. 11.

[9]Pomerantz, New York, pp. 158-59; Smith, City of New York, p. 99.

[10]See Table 1. See also Sean Wilentz, Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 27; Carl F. Kaestle, The Evolution of an Urban School System: New York City, 1750-1850 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), p. 31. For a discussion of my sampling and classification methods, see Appendix A.

[11]Pomerantz, New York, pp. 209-25; Wilentz, Chants Democratic, pp. 24-35. See also David Montgomery, "The Working Classes of the Pre-Industrial American City, 1780-1830," Labor History, 9 (Winter, 1968), 3-22.

[12]Countryman, A People in Revolution, pp. 292-94. See also Staughton Lynd, "The Mechanics in New York Politics, 1774-1785," in Class Conflict, Slavery, and the United States Constitution: Ten Essays (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967).

[13]Wilentz, Chants Democratic, p. 14. See also J.G.A. Pocock, The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republic Tradition (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975). For a review of recent studies of the republicanism idea, see Robert E. Shalhope, "Republicanism and Early American Historiography," William and Mary Quarterly, 39 (April, 1982), 334-56.

[14]Wilentz, Chants Democratic, p. 102. See also Eric Foner, Tom Paine and Revolutionary America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

[15]Gordon S. Wood, The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787 (New York: W.W. Norton, 1972), pp. 606-15.

[16]Wilentz, Chants Democratic, p. 95. See also Howard B. Rock, Artisans of the New Republic: The Tradesmen of New York City in the Age of Jefferson (New York: New York University Press, 1979).

[17]Webster quoted in Monaghan and Lowenthal, This Was New York, p. 147. See also Mott, History of American Magazines, pp. 104-07.

[18]Quote from "Preface," New-York Magazine, vol. 2 (1791), iv. Little has been written about The New-York Magazine. For brief sketches, see Mott, History of American Magazines, pp. 114-16; William Loring Andrews, "The First Illustrated Magazine Published in New York," in The Old Booksellers of New York, and Other Papers (New York: by the author, 1895); Kenneth Scott and Kristin L. Gibbons, eds., The New-York Magazine Marriages and Deaths, 1790-1797 (New Orleans: Polyauthos, 1975); Mary Rives Bowman, "Dunlap and 'The Theatrical Register' of the New-York Magazine," Studies in Philology, 24 (July, 1927), 413-25. Incidentally, Isaiah Thomas's Massachusetts Magazine also survived eight years.

[19]Editorial Announcement, New-York Magazine, 1 (March, 1790), unnumbered page. See also Mott, History of American Magazines, p. 34; Pomerantz, New York, p. 216.

[20]New-York Magazine, 1 (April, 1790), 197. For the ease of the reader, I have modernized eighteenth-century spelling and capitalization.

[21]By comparison, the new nation's largest-circulating magazine, The American Museum, had about 1,250 subscribers. See the subscription list published with The American Museum, vol. 2 (1787). See also Mott, History of American Magazines, p. 101.

[22]For details on method, see Appendix A.

[23]Of course, some of the 33 subscribers that I couldn't trace may have been from the bottom occupational groups. If Table 1 is biased, it seems likely that it is biased upward. See Appendix A for a discussion of this issue. For a complete list of subscriber occupations, see Appendix F.

[24]Smith, City of New York, p. 99. The ads are from Monaghan and Lowenthal, This Was New York, pp. 52-53, 71. See also Pomerantz, New York, chapter 4.

[25]Information on prominent individuals came from several biographical sources, including Margherita Arlina Hamm, Famous Families of New York, 2 vols. (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1901); Lyman Horace Weeks, ed., Prominent Families of New York (revised edition; New York: The Historical Co., 1898); James Grant Wilson, ed., Memorial History of the City of New York, vol. 5 (New York: New-York History Co., 1893).

[26]On Duer, see Pomerantz, New York, p. 181. On Benson and Duane, see Countryman, A People in Revolution, passim.

[27]See Appendix B.

[28]Smith, City of New York, p. 108; Pomerantz, New York, p. 197.

[29]The New-York Directory and Register (New York: Hodge, Allen, and Campbell, 1789), p. 117; Smith, City of New York, p. 107. On the General Society, see Wilentz, Chants Democratic, pp. 38-39 and passim. On Anthony Post, see Lynd, "The Mechanics," pp. 82, 107-08.

[30]Andrews, "First Illustrated Magazine," p. 60.

[31]L. Leary, "Unrecorded Early Verse by William Dunlap," American Literature, 39 (March, 1967), 87-88.

[32]For notes on the content analysis method, see Appendix A. For a general description of the content of eighteenth-century magazines, see Mott, History of American Magazines, chapter 2.

[33]Wood, Creation of the American Republic, p. 104. See also Neil Harris, The Artist in American Society: The Formative Years, 1790-1860 (New York: G. Braziller, 1966).

[34]New-York Magazine, 1 (Jan., 1790), 4.

[35]Ibid., 1 (Aug., 1790), 442. See also ibid., 1 (Feb., 1790), 104-06.

[36]Ibid., 1 (Jan., 1790), 21. See also ibid., 1 (Feb., 1790), 104-06.

[37]Ibid., 1 (April, 1790), 212-18; 1 (Aug., 1790), 467-69.

[38]The first segment is explicitly on the British constitution. See ibid., 1 (Jan., 1790), 41-47. On Adams and this book, see Wood, Creation of the American Republic, chapter 14.

[39]This tale begins in New-York Magazine, 1 (Jan., 1790), 10-15; it ends in ibid., 1 (July, 1790), 385-87. This is a translation of a romance by Madame la Comptesse de Genlis, a popular French writer of sentiment and sensation.

[40]Ibid., 1 (June, 1790), 335.

[41]Ibid., 1 (Jan., 1790), 16-17, 51; 1 (March, 1790), 160.

[42]Ibid., 1 (Jan., 1790), 22-23; 1 (March, 1790), 160-61; 1 (Nov., 1790), 646-48.

[43]Ibid., 1 (Sept., 1790), 515-16; 1 (Oct., 1790), 563-65; 1 (Feb., 1790), 90; 1 (Dec., 1790), 694-95. See also Mary Beth Norton, Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800 (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980), pp. 242-55.

[44]New-York Magazine, 1 (March, 1790), 152-53; 1 (Aug., 1790), 442.

[45]Ibid., 1 (Jan., 1790), 28-29; 1 (March, 1790), 159, 162, 1 (Jan., 1790), 18; 1 (Feb., 1790), 113.

[46]Ibid., 1 (May, 1790), 295.

[47]Ibid., 1 (Feb., 1790), 89-90; 1 (Oct., 1790), 585-86. See also Norton, Liberty's Daughters, chapter 9.

[48]New-York Magazine, 1 (Jan., 1790), 24-25.

TABLE 1

Occupational Status of Subscribers to The New-York Magazine and a Random Sample from the New York City Directory, 1790

Occupation Category	Subscriber %	Random Sample %
1. Professional	20.0 %	6.6 %
2. Merchant	29.1	8.5
3. Shopkeeper	21.5	26.5
4. Artisan	27.9	41.4
5. Nonskilled	1.5	17.0
TOTAL % (N)	100.0 % (265)	100.0 % (377)
Occupation information missing (n)	(33)	(23)

TABLE 2

The Ten Leading Occupations of Artisan Subscribers to The New-York Magazine and Artisans in a Random Sample from the New York City Directory, 1790

Subscribers		Random Sample	
Occupation	% of Artisans	Occupation	% of Artisans
1. Carpenter	9.5 %	1. Shoemaker	14.7 %
2. Printer*	9.5	2. Carpenter	11.5
3. Sea Captain*	6.8	3. Tailor	10.3
4. Barber	5.4	4. Cooper	5.8
5. Cabinet Maker	5.4	5. Ship Carpenter	3.8
6. Shoemaker	5.4	6. Hatter	3.2
7. Baker	4.1	7. Blacksmith**	2.6
8. Clock/Watchmaker	4.1	8. Blockmaker**	2.6
9. Cooper	4.1	9. Chairmaker	2.6
10. Tailor	4.1	10. Gold/Silversmith	2.6
TOP TEN TOTAL % (n)	58.1% (43)		59.6% (93)
ALL ARTISANS % (N)	100.0% (74)		100.0% (156)

*These trades do not appear at all in the random sample.

**These trades do not appear at all on the subscriber list.

TABLE 3

The Five Leading Street Addresses of Artisan Subscribers to The New-York Magazine and Artisans in a Random Sample from the New York City Directory, 1790

Subscribers		Random Sample	
Street	% of Artisans	Street	% of Artisans
1. Queen	13.5 %	1. Queen	12.8 %
2. Hanover Square	8.1	2. Fair	5.1
3. Water	8.1	3. Water	4.5
4. Broadway	5.4	4. Chatham	3.8
5. King	5.4	5. Ann	3.2
TOP FIVE TOTAL % (n)	40.5% (30)		29.5% (46)
ALL ARTISANS % (N)	100.0% (74)		100.0% (156)

TABLE 4

Proportions of Items Devoted to Various Subject Categories in The New-York Magazine, 1790

	Content Category	Proportion of Items
1.	Politics & Government	15.3 %
2.	Manners & Morals	46.8
3.	Religion	4.9
4.	Science & Health	3.9
5.	Household Advice	1.0
6.	Humor	4.2
7.	Commentary on Art, Music & Letters	3.9
8.	"American Muse" (poetry)	3.9
9.	"Intelligence" (news briefs)	3.6
10.	"Marriages," "Deaths," & other Vital Statistics	12.6
ALL ITEMS TOTAL % (N)		100.1% (308)

TABLE 5

Proportions of Items Devoted to Various Subjects Within the General Subject Category "Manners & Morals" in The New-York Magazine, 1790

"Manners & Morals" Sub-Category	Proportion of Items
1. Romance (love, seduction, etc.)	24.3 %
2. Education	9.7
3. Virtue (morality, wisdom, etc.)	29.2
4. Description (travel, erotica, slice of life, etc.)	36.8
ALL "MANNERS & MORALS" ITEMS % (N)	100.0% (144)